east side of sorrow

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by bcofl0ve

Summary

Someone has to leave first. This is a very old story. There is no other version of the story.

Not to John Egan. Not after the war.

Notes

CONTENT WARNING: this fic contains a very detailed description of someone almost taking their own life with a gun, including descriptions of the gun in their hand and descriptions of the physicality of what they almost do up to the point of the gun touching their face. please please don't force yourself to read anything you know will be triggering. your mental health comes over fic.

thank you for all the love on the young vets au so far over on tumblr (bcolfanfic if you have no clue what i'm talking about- come hang out!). and special s/o to swifty-fox for the idea about gale's sister.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: part one

“My Eliza is still asleep, I left her a letter- I could’ve written it better.”

- Ten Things One Thing, Hamilton

Sheridan, Wyoming. 01:09:24 AM

The radiator buzzed. There was snow on the ground outside- at least a foot of it. Of course there was, it was Wyoming and December after all. Bucky tapped his foot against the floor, trying to focus. He dug the toe of his sock into the carpet and inhaled.

Bagram was one thing over anything else in the summer, really fucking hot. You could stand outside naked and get a heatstroke which meant being in uniform was even hotter. Combined with how much everyone sweat day in and day out it made for a pretty miserable existence. You got used to it in some sense, but never fully.

Bucky was sittnig in the barracks getting dressed for the day when the door slammed open. Blakely’s face being red wasn’t a revelation- but the panic in his eyes was. He talking- a lot but after “Something went off,” and “Curt” processed, he lost the rest, chest constricting as he ran out with him.

Down the hall, Gale was asleep.

Bucky had gotten out of bed as quietly as he could manage, but he knew he was still on borrowed time here. Gale always woke up when he got out of bed at night, like clockwork.

He’d been timing it recently. The longest it’d taken was 17 minutes, and that was a stretch above the median. Once it'd only taken just over a minute.

“I have a cousin that’s really into this whole twin soul thing,” Gale had said once when he came walking tiredly into the living room at much too late an hour to tell him to come back to bed. *“And y’know I don’t know if I’m into all that hippy stuff. But we, you and I- I think we’re connected like that somehow- you know, intrinsically.”*

Even in his slight scramble, Bucky stopped before he left the room, staring at the other man’s sleeping figure. At the way his chest rose and fell with his breathing- how he slept with his lips parted ever so slightly, the way his eyelashes fell.

John Egan didn't know what he believed about the other side. He did know he didn't want to forget a single thing about Gale Cleven.

"What do you mean something went off?" He shouted almost in Blakely's ear as they ran, heart hammering. "Me and the guys were out there all fucking day yesterday." Blakely didn't answer, and Bucky smacked the back of his head. He shouldn't have.

It wasn't Blakely's fault that the EOD unit had missed something.

It was his.

01:00:04

He tried to write a note at the kitchen counter and didn't get very far. He'd gotten as far as Gale's name, three times, and a few sentences about how sorry he was, and he didn't know what to say after that. But he couldn't throw it away, couldn't leave him with nothing.

Bucky folded the piece of paper in half and left it there.

Gale, Gale, Gale. I'm so sorry. I love you and hope you can forgive me and move on, and have the life you deserve. I'm sorry.

Yours,

John Egan

The flowers Gale's sister had brought when she came to bring dinner a week ago were still in a vase on the table. Was real sweet of her- who doesn't bring flowers when they're dropping by their brother's house to tell him he should consider divorcing his husband on the brink of a nervous breakdown?

But Bucky couldn't find it in his heart to have any animosity towards her. The conversation between them that he wasn't supposed to hear wasn't anything he wouldn't tell Gale to his face himself- if he wasn't so scared he'd actually hear him out.

"I'm not doing that Dor, I can't-, can't go back on my vows."

"He'd forgive you. I know he would, and even if he didn't Gale you can't keep living like this."

She got all choked up then, and Bucky could hear Gale shushing her from where he was laying in bed, counting the bumps in the ceiling

paint.

“For him I can.”

“At least think about it, please. Mama’s been worried sick about you too because you don’t call anymore.”

Well, enough replaying that in his head.

01:07:12

The path to the living room from the kitchen was one Bucky knew well. It was Gale’s favorite place to pace when he was on the phone with the VA. It should’ve been Bucky calling them but it took one call gone bad making him inconsolable for an hour for Gale to affirmatively decide it was his monster to handle.

The last call Bucky ever had with them he’d been screaming. Gale only raised his voice on the phone once, and during a conversation he’d taken away from his pacing route that Bucky didn’t think he’d wanted him to hear.

He rarely swore either. But every man had his lines, even men as pure and good as King Cleven.

“He can’t wait 2 weeks. I swear to God- if he goes out and wraps his car around a tree every one of your jobs is gone. What the fuck is wrong with you- you get off on making people’s lives hell? You’re all sick.”

If nothing else, it’d gotten his appointment that they kept delaying moved up. And Bucky felt guilty for not opening up as much as he probably should’ve when he knew it took all that to get him in there. The therapist was nice enough. It wasn’t his fault the fact that he was missing a leg was distracting him.

Curt was there on the ground, and one of his legs wasn’t. The whole area was chaotic with people, picking up their friends- or the pieces of them, yelling about how they needed to move it in case there was another explosive.

He could hear Gale’s shouting in the distance as he picked Curt up, holding him around his shoulders and booking it.

It’d been a couple weeks since he spoke to Curt now- an abnormality given how much they talked.

Curt seemed to have realized this was weird too because he'd called two days ago. Bucky didn't answer, didn't feel up to talking. He did listen to his voicemail.

"Hey Bucky, just calling to check in. Been a minute since I heard from you, talked to Gale this morning and I know you're having a hard time. Give me a call back when you can. Me and Kenny are trying to figure out a good time to come see you guys again. I love you, alright? Don't forget that."

He wouldn't forget Curt. At least he hoped he wouldn't.

01:12:42

Bucky picked the gun up off the coffee table, holding it loosely. Sure would be embarrassing if he accidentally set it off and woke Gale up.

Oh hey, whoops! You can go back to bed, nothing to see here. There's a note on the counter for you. I'll tell our old friends that we watched die together that you said hello. Off you go now.

Especially couldn't do that when he wasn't even supposed to have the thing.

He'd noticed a couple weeks ago that Gale's gun was gone from where he knew he kept it in the closet. And not that Gale would care about the technicalities, but he didn't go out and procure a replacement just to kill himself with it.

It was knowing his husband was so damn worried about his beloved lunatic that he was potentially sacrificing them on a silver platter to any bad actors that made him itch.

If only the itching stopped when he got the gun and brought it home, shoving it behind the couch and hoping Gale wouldn't come up with some reason to move it.

He didn't. And the itch persisted.

01:14:03

He should've taken this outside, shouldn't mess up the house like this. But Gale, Gale Gale Gale had gone out and gotten an alarm that rang his phone attached to the doors after one too many nights where an episode took Bucky out to investigate something that wasn't there.

He should've put something in the note apologizing for fucking up the wallpaper, he thought as he turned it around.

The barrel of a gun wasn't a new sight to behold. When he touched the tip to his chin the metal felt cool, cooler than guns had ever felt in his sweaty palms in Bagram.

But not enough for it to be the reason for the chill that he suddenly felt coursing up his spine.

01:15:55

"John?"

His finger itched, but he couldn't pull the trigger. Not in front of him, not like this. He squeezed his eyes shut, willing Gale to go back to bed instead of walking further enough into the dark to see what was going on.

When he didn't do that, he swore he could hear Gale's heart stop beating across the room.

He pressed his eyes open slowly, the look that met him on his husband's face making him want to shut them again. Gale's chin was starting to tremble, like he was actively trying to keep his face from crumbling.

"John," He said again, reaching back to flip on the light without looking away from him. "Hey- why don't you pass that to me?"

John shook his head, feeling his eyes start to well up. If only he wasn't such a coward, this could all be over right now.

Gale was saying something about how they could find the lock box and put it away and go back to bed, but it sounded garbled, farther away than it actually was.

Everything he was feeling felt heightened. How heavy the gun felt in his hand, how Gale's voice sounded as he took baby steps closer, saying three more versions of asking him to hand it over. What the ridges on the trigger felt like under the calluses on his finger.

Then Gale wasn't walking towards him- he was on top of him, and Bucky lurched to fight him like a rabid dog- teeth gnashing, nails digging down his arms so hard that he could feel it when he drew

blood.

They wrestled like that, until the scuffle knocked John's hand against the trigger and-

BANG

The noise- the scream, that proceeded to come out of Gale was a sound he didn't know capable of making.

He'd heard it more than once overseas, mostly from mothers. Never from Gale.

Bucky folded forward with his hands over his ears- the yelling that it took him a minute to realize was his own muffled by his knees.

Curt's blood soaked his hands, soaked through his shirt- seeped right through his chest to his heart.

"It went into the wall."

Gale wasn't dead. Neither of them were dead, because Bucky could hear his voice, feel his hands on his shoulders- his breath on the back of his neck.

"It went into the wall, John."

Bucky couldn't unglue his forehead from his knees. If he stayed down here, he could rot and never have to look Gale in the eyes again. He'd move out of the house where his unstable husband shot a hole in the wall and leave Bucky there as a memorial statue to the worst day of his life. Maybe his friends would make a pilgrimage out to leave flowers. Curt and Kenny would. He'd told Brady to go fuck himself the last time they spoke- over what he couldn't remember, so not him. He wasn't sure about the others.

He hadn't always been so morbid.

"John, hon," Gale said, pulling on his shoulders again, this time making more headway at getting him uncurled from himself. Bucky was too exhausted to put up much of a fight, his whole body trembling. He couldn't see where Gale had put the gun. Just his neck as his head dropped against him, the tears pouring the second Gale moved an arm under his armpit to hoist him closer.

"You're okay, you're safe."

They stayed like that for what felt like a hour, time seeming to slow. Until Gale sat up, nudging him to the side and onto the couch. He didn't get right up, pressing a hand onto Bucky's knee.

“We’re gonna- we gotta go, baby. Gonna get your shoes, I’ll be right back.”

Bucky saw where he'd put the gun then, sitting on the floor by his feet. Gale grabbed it up when he left, speed walking in a way that would've made him chuckle- because he looked like a Looney Toons character- if Bucky didn't know it was because he thought he might lunge for it.

Gale came back with his shoes, dropping to his knees in front of the couch to put them on him. His hands shook against his lap, Gale taking them into his own when his shoes were on. He held them tightly, squeezing and tilting his head up to meet Bucky’s eyes even when he wouldn’t look up.

“I love you.” He said, softly, standing up and bringing Bucky with him- careful to not just yank him up. “I love you,” He said again, arm around his shoulder- pressing his face into Bucky’s cheek. “I love you so much.”

The car ride to the emergency room was silent. How dark the ruralness of Wyoming was at night gave Bucky the creeps so he shut his eyes. Tucked his head down and pressed the heels of his hands into them.

He felt Gale’s palm on his shoulder, moving to rub the back of his neck as he drove with one hand. Normally he’d tell him to be careful, focus on the road and drive with two hands.

He didn’t care as much now.

02:02:54

The triage nurse was kind. Asked too many questions, questions he hated having to answer in front of Gale. But she was pretty, with soft eyes. Somehow wide awake, and gentle at two in the morning. Gale thanked her no short of fifty times.

When she left to get a psych in Gale waited until the door shut before he stood up and motioned for Bucky to scoot. He squeezed into the hospital bed next to him, nudging his husband forward a little so he

could slide in behind him.

It was awkward in such a small space, but even the tiny degree better than Bucky felt almost in his lap was worth it.

He let his head fall against his shoulder, his chest untightening when he felt Gale stroking his cheek with the back of his hand.

“Can’t leave me like this,” He said, voice watery- and hushed. “What would I do?”

Bucky had an answer to that, but he didn’t think it was the one he was looking for. So he didn’t answer, just pressed his face into his neck- Gale swaying him side to side the best he could squeezed into a hospital bed.

If this was it, Bucky thought, he’d be okay with that. If he could will himself to leave like this- his final moments on this wretched earth being rocked by his husband like his mother did him when he was a little boy- then he would’ve.

What Gale didn’t know couldn’t hurt him anymore than he already had.

Wyoming State Hospital - Evanston, Wyoming

The psych ward was a psych ward. There wasn’t much more to it. It wasn’t in Sheridan, damn rural Wyoming and its medical system straight infrastructure of the 1800s. Gale had pleaded for them to let him drive him- or at least let him follow the ambulance in his truck to see him there anyhow.

Gale was informed they’d contact him when he was allowed to visit, and they said goodbye in a hallway. The ambulance was somehow the most restful sleep Bucky had gotten in recent memory.

(Maybe because Gale followed in his truck anyways)

Bucky tried to do what was expected of him. Show up to group therapy, open up to his individual therapist about what made him go out and buy a gun- be friendly to the other people there. Shockingly, it even seemed to be working like it was supposed to.

But he couldn’t remember the last time he’d gone more than 24 hours without Gale, and he could feel it in his bones.

He'd been there for exactly 55 hours before a nurse, Natalie, came in as he walked out of group therapy, flagging him down before he could walk off to hole up in his room before dinner.

"Hi honey!" She said, eyes as bright as they always were. Natalie was Bucky's favorite, even if he didn't understand how she could be so upbeat working with everyone and their problems. "Been looking for you, your psych said she thinks you're in a place where you can have visitors now. She's gonna call your husband well- now I think!"

"She is?" He said, unable to keep from smiling- for what had to have been the first time in days.

Natalie squeezed the side of his shoulder. "There's a nice smile. My husband does that for me too."

-

Gale was set to come the next day, Bucky plopping himself down on a couch by the door to the visitation room an hour before he was supposed to show up. There was an attempt made at reading a book, but he couldn't focus.

"Mr. Egan," Natalie said as she stepped out of the visitation room, shutting the door behind her when she was through it. He was up immediately, fidgeting with his fingers.

"Your husband brought a friend of yours with him. If you don't want to see him as well that's okay- and he understands, but I did tell him I'd ask."

"A friend- who?"

Bucky scratched the back of his neck. They hadn't had anything close to a full conversation before Gale left the hospital in Sheridan, but the topic of their buddies had come up right before he had to go.

"If the other guys ask about you,"

"I'm at a farm upstate."

He was proud of the fact that Gale had laughed just a little at that. But he regretted that he hadn't given him a serious answer because now that he thought about it Gale telling any one of them made his stomach turn over on itself.

He tapped his fingers against his side, agitation rising in his throat.

“Let me look,” She said, glancing down at her clip-board. “He said his name was Curt Biddick?”

Bucky brushed past her, opening the door to the visitation room. His face felt hot, and he presumed it looked that way too with the way Gale and Curt’s faces both distorted when they made eye contact with him. Their smiles dropped clean off, Bucky taking a shuddering breath in and out.

“Both of you can leave.”

Chapter 2: part two

Chapter Notes

> first off- a buddy of mine of tumblr wrote not one but TWO beautiful “between chapters” fics for this, a gale pov and a curt pov of the gale pov (with some curt/ken action. please go read their gorgeous writing and give it some love. ive never experienced someone wanting to write for an au i created before and feel so lucky that the first time came with such amazing writing <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“John,” Gale tried, but Bucky just shook his head, neck feeling tight. He reached back to hold it with one hand, inhaling again.

“Couldn’t even wait till you could ask my permission, just had to let the whole peanut gallery know- huh?” He said, squeezing where his hand was resting. “The rest of them hiding in your truck?”

Gale seemed to visibly deflate with every word that left his mouth, and under normal circumstances John would hate seeing him so crestfallen.

A psych ward halfway across the state wasn’t normal circumstances, and when Curt lowered his voice to tell Gale something he couldn’t hear he could feel the coil in his throat being yanked.

“Where’s your little pity fuck at, huh? You let him off leash to run around the parking lot?”

Bucky was proud of that one. Whatever was going on with Curt and Kenny- Bucky had no idea. There was *something* - as made glaringly obvious by the air mattress Gale had thrown into the guest room when they visited two months ago not even leaving its box. Something they tried to be obtuse about, something that gave him a big red button on Curt’s chest to push.

Damn Curt and his being a good sport about Bucky trying to hit where it hurt.

He took a step closer, saying something about how he was only here because he cared about him- and before Bucky could think better of it he gave him a hard shove. Gale caught him by the arm before he

could completely lose his balance and he felt a hand on his own elbow within a few seconds.

“Mr. Egan.” Natalie said. “I understand you're upset, but we can't let it out like this.”

Bucky groaned, shaking her off, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Why can’t we huh? They came here to talk to me, we’re just talking.”

He felt her sigh almost in his ear, chest tightening when she exchanged a look with Gale and Curt that didn’t seem positive.

Turns out shoving your friend around in front of other patients trying to visit with their families, and trying to do it again after being told not to, was a quick way to get your visiting privileges revoked.

“What’d you *do* Bucky, what’d you do,”

He’d been in his room, face shoved in a pillow mumbling to himself hysterical for five minutes before there was a knock at the door and Natalie poked her head in. She moved the pillow out from under him when she came over, pulling at his shoulders to help him sit up just like Gale had a few nights ago.

Natalie was kind.

She wasn’t Gale.

“Messed it all up, he’s not- not gonna have anyone to pick me up- gonna have to move to fuckin’ Evanston.” He rushed out, hiccupping as he swiped at his snotty note with his sleeve.

Natalie wasn’t Gale, but he sure better get used to finding comfort in a pretty girl.

“Oh, John,” She said, grabbing the tissue box from the nightstand and placing it into his hands.

“I don’t think that’s true. I talked to them before they left- they're just as upset as you that today didn’t go like it was supposed to. Your friend even argued with me saying he didn't care that you pushed him, he didn't want leave."

Curt was a better friend than he ever was, he mused in his head. Gale and him deserved each other.

He pushed his hands through his hair and back down his face, groaning into his palms when they reached his mouth.

“Curt was m’ best friend. And all I said to him was makin’ fun of his boyfriend- fuck, don’t even know if he *is* his boyfriend. Haven’t talked to him about his own life in a long time,”

Natalie was saying something about how she was sure Curt understood, that he knew he was struggling- and Bucky tried to take it to heart.

As much as you could take something to a heart that was breaking, at least.

Three days later Bucky was told he could try again. Natalie snuck him a little extra at breakfast in the morning, told him she had a feeling it was going to be a good day.

He hoped she was right, feeling unsure when he met eyes with Gale as he walked into the visitation room.

There was an air of resignation following him like a cloud of fog, and Bucky knowing his own bullshit was responsible for it made his stomach hurt.

A part of him wanted to ruin it all again, just so he didn’t have to see the hurt all over Gale’s face that he put there.

He took a deep breath, trying to remember what his therapist had told him to tell himself when the itch came back.

“You aren’t your impulses John. They don’t have to be your reality.”

“Curt drove me- if you wanna talk to him too, he’s around.”

Gale looked at the chair in front of him for a moment before pushing it back in, coming around to sit on the edge of the table on Bucky’s side.

Seeing him in civilian clothes still felt wrong sometimes. Today he was in jeans and a JSTOR sweatshirt. The JSTOR sweatshirt Bucky had gotten him for his birthday the year before.

“Where did you even find this?” Gale had said through a laugh, tracing over the embroidered patch with his finger. “Somehow,” Bucky said motioning for him to hold it up so he could take a picture on his phone.

“There’s a market for this stuff.”

Bucky wasn’t a dumb man, but Gale was smarter. Where Bucky was content to let the world be what it was, Gale wanted- and chased answers. Wanted to understand what made all the cogs turn the way they did, and why.

He loved that about him.

He’d miss it.

Swallowing a lump in his throat, he broke the silence that was going on too long for his liking.

“If you’re gonna- if you’re gonna ask for a divorce I’d rather you rip the Band-Aid off Buck.”

He wasn’t looking up at him but could still feel Gale recoil some, feel his eyes boring into the side of his head.

“Heard you and Dor talkin’ that night. You told her you’d think about it.”

Gale let out a sigh and Bucky lifted his gaze.

If this was it he might as well look him in the eyes while he said it.

“I did think about it.” Gale said, rubbing his pant leg. “This has been hard, John. ‘m gonna lie to you. But you’re it for me. As long as you’ll have me, as long as you want me around- I want to fix this, and I’m not going anywhere.”

“Y’ still love me?”

It fell out of his mouth before he could stop it and he had enough wherewithal to regret it, chewing on his lip, letting his eyes fall to one of the motivational posters taped up on the wall.

GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR HOW FAR YOU’VE COME, THIS IS NOT THE END!

He almost startled when he felt Gale reaching over to take one of his hands into his own, sliding off where he was sitting on the table to crouch in front of him.

A part of him was clawing to be embarrassed about how childlike this felt, his husband a few years his junior crouched down on the floor

talking to him like his mother did when she put him in time out.

"Do you understand why you got in trouble sweetheart? Doesn't mean I don't love you, but it's my job to keep you safe." She'd say next to him on the stairs after he got caught crawling out the window in the hallway onto the roof again. It was bi-monthly tradition. He'd go out, holding onto the side of the house with one hand- shielding his eyes from the sun with the other, his mother would tell him to come in and he'd say something that was mean in a way only a little boy could be mean to his mama.

The feeling of his hands in Gale's overrode the embarrassment.

"I don't think I've ever loved you more than I did when I thought- when the gun went off." He said slowly, "Those half seconds, I knew I wouldn't recover and- and then when I found your note, when you weren't there and it almost felt like you *were* gone. God, John it'd be *me* in the looney bin, if,"

Bucky didn't want him to finish that sentence, and latched on to a question that had been plaguing him for the past couple days.

"The hole still there?"

"Curt fixed it."

Of course he did, Bucky thought. In hindsight, he was ridiculous for being so agitated that Gale had called him.

Curt was good people. Of course Curt fixed the hole.

"You think he's gonna forgive me for calling Ken his dog?"

"For being so outta' your mind you got in a helluva one liner."

Curt pulled out the chair across from his and plopped down, Bucky picking at a thread on his sleeve.

"Yeah, shame they don't do open mics here or I'd be workshopping some more material."

He looked up at his friend then, leaning in a little- lowering his voice.

"But why're you guys so cagey about whatever you have goin' on anyways? It's 2022, love is love Curt."

Bucky chuckled under his breath when Curt's eyes widened before he

steeled his expression. He didn't say anything, just popped his knuckles- sucked one side of his cheek in with a small huff.

"Yeah, guess we're here to talk about me." Bucky said, tapping his feet against the ground. "But you owe me an explanation when I'm outta here."

Leaning forward, Curt brought his elbows to rest on the table- looking at Bucky in a way that told him whatever he was about to say was important.

"Y' know I forgave you- for what happened, yeah?"

Bucky froze, his head suddenly feeling heavy behind his eyes. He squeezed his eyes shut and opened them, and Curt was still sitting there, hands folded in wait.

"Yeah- yeah. Told me that before." Bucky replied, leaning back in his chair, pushing backwards to raise it on its back legs.

Rocking it back forward after he almost lost his balance, he let the front legs hit the ground with a thud. Curt didn't flinch.

"Mhm. But Bucky I need ya'- I need you to hear what I'm saying and actually believe it." He continued "It wasn't your fault. It coulda, it could've been something that they planted in the middle of the night- and even if it wasn't- what'd Brady used to say?

"That we were EODs, not G-O-Ds."

As Bucky spoke he could hear Brady's voice in his head over his own. He'd said that little colloquium so much overseas that Bucky grew sick of it. The last time they spoke it'd been what made him snap. He ought to apologize for that when he got out of here, he thought.

"What'd I always tell you Bucky, we were EODS, not G-O-."

Bucky cut him off with a groan, gripping the phone so hard his knuckles turned white. "Yeah and you still managed to get a god complex. Go fuck yourself- and don't bug Buck on my behalf either."

"You could only control so much."

"But-"

"No." Curt said, tilting his head to the side a little like he was scolding a dog. "No buts. I'm not, not sayin' you have to square it all in your

head right this very second. But you've gotta make your peace with it, and I have a feelin' I'm the one you needed to hear that from."

He wouldn't give him the glory of saying it to his face.

But Curt was right.

"You ever consider bein' a therapist?"

"Ah- wouldn't be any good at that." He said, leaning back with a laugh. "I have patience for you 'cause you're Bucky. Other people's problems, eh- not s' much."

"I followed you."

"Hm?" Bucky said, rubbing his thumb against where it had come to rest against Gale's pinky.

There were psych follow ups to be had, pills to remember to take, safety plans to make sure they followed. But he was in Gale's truck, and Gale loved him. After two weeks in a psych ward he was going home with his husband and didn't want to die.

That was enough to make him feel more at peace than he had in a long time.

"In the ambulance. They told me not to, but I did anyway. Didn't think I was gonna sleep if I didn't see you go through those doors in one piece."

"Jesus, Buck that must've been, what- 8 hours?" He said, and Gale cocked his head to the left and back, doing the math in his head.

Seven hours and nine minutes. Fourteen hours and eighteen minutes technically speaking.

"Eh, closer to seven."

Bucky didn't know what he still believed about the Catholic faith he was raised in. But if there was some legitimacy to the whole saints thing then he had half a mind to write to Pope Francis and figure out how Buck Cleven could be made one.

He'd more than earned it, surely.

“I love you,” Bucky said into his skin, between pressing kisses up his neck. When he reached Gale’s jaw he pulled back, cupping his face in his hands- tugging on a tuft of his hair as his hips stuttered. He pressed their foreheads together, and he could tell that Gale was fighting to keep his eyes open- but fight he did.“I love you.”

It didn’t last long- something that didn’t come unexpectedly when it’d been so long. When they were cleaned up, the bed was cleaned up- and they were back under the covers- Bucky let his hand come to the side of Gale’s face again. He was laying nearly on top of him, Gale’s arms holding him there as he rubbed the peak of his skin on his lower back where his shirt was riding up.

“Hm?” Gale said when Bucky didn’t say anything, the love in his eyes made his breath catch. Surely it had been there all along, all through the war, all through his spiral- even when he had a gun to his head. But he never saw it as fully as he did now.

“I,” Bucky started, and the breath that caught in his throat morphed into a lump, his eyes starting to sting. Gale moved a hand off his back and to his cheek, swiping at the single tear that escaped and fell down it.

“I don’t know how ‘m ever supposed to repay you, for any of it.”

“You’re still here,” Gale said, rubbing the pad of this thumb on his jaw line. “Everything else we're gonna figure out together, okay?"

Bucky exhaled, pressing his face into his neck.

Gale pressed a kiss to his hair.

He was glad he stayed.

But I can’t leave.

I can’t leave because I have yet to see the sun set over and through the redwood trees. And I can’t leave because I have yet to find rest in the mess and I still have a little something more to give than my best.

I can’t leave because next Saturday I made plans and I don’t want to be late. I can’t leave because I love the way s[***he*** *] cooks and part of me wonders at age 74 how I will look.*

And as silly as it sounds, I’ve never seen a moose in the wild. And I want to

see a moose in the wild.

I can't leave because for as hard as living can be I can't help but believe there is beauty beginning to bloom out of the brokenness.

I believe there is. And I am going to see it.

- tanner wilson

Chapter End Notes

one more reminder to go read the gale pov and curt pov my friend wrote bc i truly cant get over someone writing fic for my fic!!! and thank you *all* for all the love on both this fic and the young vets au in general. i may be slowly forgetting barry keoghan isnt an amputee, but ive truly had so much fun creating this little world with our blorbos. next on the fic roster for it is something more curt/kenny focused, but the bucks will be revisited <3

End Notes

this more disjointed writing structure style is something i love but am somewhat insecure about actually publishing so i hope it's alright. still working on part two- should be up by the end of the week (along with all again chap 3, sorry for the delay there!)

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